



The London Tapes 1

The Brussels Tapes

THE STORY OF A SUPERMODEL OF A GODDESS A Secret Report

Abstract

The designing and making of scale models as a design-research tool is an 'object' of only recent discovery to the author. It also is the subject of this article.

This article is a reflection on the question: How can the making of scale models become a legitimate tool and part of a method in a PhD project in Architecture?

Accordingly, this article will only barely scratch the surface of the research topics to be dealt with in the PhD project itself.¹

Rather it tells the story and the whereabouts of two imaginary cities – 'Supermodels of a Goddess' – which have been produced to contain three of the author's architectural designs,² selected by himself out of the body of work he has realized up till now.

One imaginary city, containing these architectural designs, was created for a London exhibition in July – August 2008 at Westminster University School of Architecture and the Built Environment ('The London Tapes 1').

Another imaginary city, containing the same architectural designs, was created for a Brussels exhibition in September 2008 at Sint-Lucas School of Architecture ['The Brussels Tapes'], within the framework of the 8th Research Training Session 'By Design For Design'.

In 'A Letter from a Decade Three Floors Below', the personal background of the author and a link with both the Reinvention of the Polis and the scale model as a method or instrument is sketched.

In 'The Prophetic Content of the Trojan Horse, the concept of scale models as an instrument of investigation and communication is compared with other instruments and the methods of splendid ancestors and colleagues from the glorious past and present of architecture.

In 'A Supermodel of a Goddess: the London Tapes 1 and The Brussels Tapes', the concept of combining distant geographic frameworks and far away time zones in the making of these scale models is described through the metaphor of the making of an imaginary painting.

Subsequently, the selection process within the author's own body of work is described through the metaphor of characters in a theatre play and a crime scene investigation with an imaginary autopsy.

Finally, the author gives some recommendations, especially to himself, in a short concluding chapter.

A LETTER FROM A DECADE THREE FLOORS BELOW

A Secret Inner Dialogue with the Author's Past

"If a person takes good care of himself, he takes care of his best friend".³ Recently I had the good fortune to receive this confidential letter from a friend from long ago, that little boy in the precious bubble of childhood.⁴ He wrote a sincere confession to me:

Dear Me,

My dreams were already taking shape at the age of nine, when I started to invent my own Polis – and more than one! As a young boy I drew plans of strange and imaginary cities, fascinating myself with rivers and docks, railways, motorway interchanges and skyscrapers.

Today, I call those creatures from back then 'Invented Cities Zero'.

In the meantime, teachers anxiously kept me away from dreaming and drawing, insistent as they were to teach me useful mathematics and things like medieval history, which matched very well with the feudality of my humble pubertal state of being, beginning to see girls in the utmost beauty of their appearance....

I learned how to be an architect. I understood the sense of mathematics. But I kept resisting the prohibition of my dream, secretly hoping for the proliferation of it one day. I lied "no", when somebody asked if I was still longing for it. It was my own private conspiracy, my RESISTANCE, my 39 years of wait and see!

With Poetics as my answer to the sad and muddy obedience of the world, I could resist and produce a small body of work as an architect.

*So, "I never lost control," face to face with the man who sold the world".⁵ **ISN'T THIS HOW IT GOES? (The "...control, face to face..." does not make sense to me I see, but it is like that in the David Bowie song, and since this is a quote...)*

I can put forward my assumption that – with my Poetics as my method in the In-Between –, I am ready to reinvent the Polis through design
Hence, I need a tool to investigate this assumption and to communicate its potential and the results.

It is my belief that this method just might inspire others, and by so doing become useful new knowledge for the world. From Subropolis to [Metro]Polis.
From this stance I will call the designs to come 'Invented Cities Z', and look upon the wasted time between Zero and Z as a blessing, my forty days in the wilderness, my hour of darkness before finally seeing the light reflected in the tears of the Goddess. I will comfort Her by reinventing – especially for Her – the new Polis by [my] design [method]. I will research it, I will test it and proclaim it in Her Agora.

Restlessly, I am looking for the right tools to reach my goal.

*Yours sincerely,
 Me.*

THE PROPHETIC CONTENT OF THE TROJAN HORSE

The Reinvention of the Polis starts with a humble critique in the margins of a domain. Subsequently, the critic himself infiltrates the domain and trespasses into the voids in which to settle in order to generate a lean change of the Polis from within.

This is not the author's place and time to unfold his critique on the 'lack of Polis' in actual cities, nor will this article be a description of a remedy or a medicine to help a patient under the custody of strange agents of a sinister occupying army.⁶ There is still a whole PhD project ahead of us to be dedicated to these issues.

Just as Rome wasn't built in a day, the Reinvention of the Polis takes patience, effort and a well conceived strategy

In history, two splendid ancestors from the glorious past of architecture and one provocative and profoundly acting contemporary colleague had/have their specifically developed instruments and methods to project their visions of a time to come.

Of course there were many more of them, but these three are the object of the author's special attention for the way they treat their own imagination and/or the way they analyse the potential of their own investigative tools.

Giovanni Battista Nollì made propositions for the reinvention of his Polis – Rome –, not by building them, but by making tempting propositions through skillful graphic representations driven by his imagination and the way he saw the future of humanity.⁷ More specifically, and by means of his appropriate drawing technique, Nollì represented enclosed public spaces in public buildings and churches as open civic places, hence acknowledging the importance of public space and the civil society in the way he saw the Polis⁸ in a period of history after the Contra-Reformation and the Inquisition when the Papacy had to consider sharing its power with the upcoming civic mercantilist society, yet allowing and even ordering a proposition for a future Rome to become the better version of a haven for Humanity.

Nollì's instrument was his map, his drawing technique was his skill.

Giambattista Piranesi, in the slipstream of Nollì and in cooperation with him, produced his own 'Pianta di Roma disegnatà colla situazione di tutti i Monumenti antichi'.⁹

"The big plan, the *Immaginaria* goes beyond the study and the polemic defence in favour of Roman architecture, towards a speculative archeology in which literary and archaeological sources are linked with the inventio of the architect a recreation of the past by means of imagination..."¹⁰

"Graphically, Piranesi presents his plan as if it were part of a city map sculptured in marble – like a new Forma Urbis –, the monumental genuine Severian Marble Plan of

Rome measuring approximately 18 x 13 metres. Fragments of this plan had been re-discovered in the sixteenth century ... re-assembled by Giovanni Battista Nolli during his collaboration with Piranesi for the plan of the actual Rome (1748). ... Moreover, he [Piranesi] already had created new fragments for the plan: a mixture of existing structures with hypothetical reconstructions."¹¹

Daniel Libeskind wrote a very tempting essay about the status of the architectural drawing. "There is a historical tradition in architecture, whereby drawings (as well as other forms of communication) signify more than can be embodied in stabilized frameworks of objectifiable data. If we can go beyond the material carrier (sign) into the internal reality of a drawing, the reduction of representation to a formal system – seeming at first void and useless – begins to appear as an extension of reality. ..."¹² "An architectural drawing is as much a prospective unfolding of future possibilities as it is a recovery of a particular history to whose intentions it testifies and whose limits it always challenges ... I am interested in the profound relation which exists between the intuition of geometric structure as it manifests itself in a pre-objective sphere of experience and the possibility of formalization which tries to overtake in the objective realm."^{13, 14}

The first two examples might be seen as hypothetical reconstructions, an amplified version of an archeologist's method.

The third example describes the potential of the architectural drawing as a highly powerful medium achieving the status of a legitimate reality in its own right.

And what if we see ourselves as archeologists of an inverted kind, combining the first two examples with the third example, on the one hand investigating the hypothetical reconstructions of the Polis of a future yet to come by designing provocative propositions of the apparently impossible, and on the other hand transforming Daniel Libeskind's drawing into a scale model and using it as a means to serve the purpose of the subject of a PhD?

And look at us then, being served by the scale model as an architectural medium of prediction and communication which achieves the status of a legitimate reality in its own right!

A SUPERMODEL OF A GODDESS (THE LONDON TAPES I AND THE BRUSSELS TAPES) Two Investigative / Communicative Scale Models

This PhD project will require a powerful tool of investigation and representation.

So, it demands a lot of hands-on work that still needs to be done. It requires very 'hands-on down-to-earth' SETTINGS to operate in. We need to fertilize the ground in which we will cultivate the IMAGINATION. We will need something solid to base our hypothetical reconstruction of the future on.

One cannot have both SETTINGS and IMAGINATION in their own and independent freewheeling drift. Their dynamics must be tuned accurately one towards the other in order to accurately trace the momentum of their interdependency.

The urge to encourage imagination needs to be protected by the wisdom to keep the eye of ratio on the parameters of the settings.

If architecture wants to escape from an imminent Babylonian state of being – as a dangerous exile safely banned in the neutralized empire of harmless fantasy – , it needs to pass from fantasy into imagination¹⁵ on the way to its next and ultimate state of being: ultimately achieving the blessings of its materialized fulfilment.

The scale model, as a materialized instrument of prediction in architecture, can produce embodied KNOWLEDGE to achieve MEANING as a medicine against the nonsensical and as a guideline on the slippery paths toward a deeper KNOWING of the way we see ourselves within the world.

It is here that 'The London Tapes I' and 'The Brussels Tapes' come onto the stage. They are the Supermodels of a Goddess called 'Polis'.

What is the nature of those Supermodels, and how winding was the road along which their characters came into being?

Well, here the author wishes to reveal that he has partly been inspired by the way writers, film directors and painters bring us to a profound and legitimate belief in their story'.

So in what follows next, out of a very brief description of the way those artists work, a parallel description is summed up, in order to shine a light on the birth of the Supermodels.

Subsequently, the genesis of the models is metaphorically described in a Hypertext as if it were the meticulous setting of a theatre play, which in turn seems to be a crime scene investigation.

Between the lines of the hypertext, the reader is encouraged to find the ineffable truth of a process still too grim to be talked about....

A 'TRUTH' WE ARE SEDUCED INTO BY WRITERS, PAINTERS AND FILM DIRECTORS

In literature and film, multiple time frames can be mingled as an instrument to inform the reader and the viewer. Medieval painters collected appealing 'views' while 'on the road' in order to combine them by 'free' association in the pictorial compositions they made once they were back at home painting in their workshops, creating wonderful amplified worlds which inform us about deeper meanings in order to generate understanding.¹⁶

THE BIRTH OF A SUPERMODEL AND THE METICULOUS SETTING OF A THEATRE PLAY

A. THE BIRTH

The Supermodels, as architectural representations, came into being through a comparable technique as the one applied by painters and writers in that the two scale models materially combine - on purpose! - distant geographic frameworks and far away time zones in order to inform and to emphasize the quintessential of the Polis in connection with a body of work of an architect, leaving out the irrelevant miles and less important minutes in between the inches and seconds that really matter to both the urban fabric and the architectural body of work.¹⁷

So, a designed, thus imaginary, and designable, thus real (!) urban fabric contracts the Polis to its essence by making it a denser version of itself.¹⁸

B. THE METICULOUS SETTING OF A THEATRE PLAY

The separate architectural designs of an architect's body of work can be seen as a series of characters in a theatre play.

It was a sudden and inevitable urge of the author to arrange a well defined series of these characters in a line-up.

Having to make a selection out of his own body of work as an architect, the author of this article must have felt like those painters bringing together in a single metaphoric *'petite histoire'* those prominent figures of an imaginary medieval town, and holding them together with a 'squeezing awareness' of a not too peaceful *'non-coexistence'* between them, and by doing so really throwing another light upon *'la grande histoire'*.

In the painting, the looks in the eyes of the painted figures could explain a balance of power and 'war at first sight'. While one belonged to the guild of butchers, the other one appeared to be a vegetarian, and next to the vegetarian the painting introduced a woman who was known not to be a nice person at all. This woman, in turn, was accompanied by a small black dog that, without paying any attention to her, was fiercely attacking the paws of a big white horse passing by 'coincidentally' in the right corner of the painting....

The shape and position of the big white horse in the painting was placed there not only to show the fierce character of the woman's dog, which in turn was meant to illustrate the woman's despicable character and her bad taste. It was not even the woman who needed a dog, rather it was the painter who needed a vast white but living surface in his composition to reflect the light from the right side of the painting and to project it into the centre of the composition.

Sometimes, in compositions, we simply need physical white objects to reflect the meta-physical light on the essence of a dark story.

And what about the architect himself, being at the 3 p.m. in his lifetime, looking 'the past inwards', over there over his shoulder, with the critical gaze of the sailor's eyes....

Well...?

"It was a painful and confronting process of selection, like the unwilling rejection of one of one's own children, the architectural designs - all of them - being 'limbs' of the body of work, resulting in a suffering oeuvre of a wounded author...."

Like in a crime scene investigation,¹⁹ a sometimes painful autopsy on one's own professional body needed to be performed, bringing together all the bits and bites of information on one big and well lighted guttered marble table. It involves a ranging and rearranging of amputated body parts. It requires a precise ordering of information, checking every combination, overlooking nothing and looking for connections up till now hidden.

This process finally ended up in an underpinned, rigorous and limited selection, with 'The Reinvention of the Polis' as the buttress of criteria.

Finally, the most liberating outcome of this process is the resulting new scale model, the speculative image of a 'might be future', an Invented City Z. It brings the researcher into the happy momentum of cerebral understanding of his research subject, thus resulting in embodied knowledge of his work, his life, himself and the way he stands in the world.

This also implies the proof that the material scale-model-object shows, in material matter and mental image, what is happening with an idea in the real world, and how it stands or not.

And if not, then the researcher, like Sisyphus, has to start rolling that stone back up the hill....

CONCLUSIONS:

Still being in the midst of this ongoing process, it is too early to formulate any final conclusions.

However, some main lines of thought are gradually becoming clear:

First, the building of scale models as a research tool has in the meantime proven its applicability and is actually being applied in the field in London and Brussels.

Secondly, the scale model can be a tool to tell with, to convince, to advocate in order - who knows? - to bring the imagined proposition into the real and physical world as one possible and convincing format of representation and probability of a hypothetical reconstruction of a future.

Thirdly, and this is the most important and promising conclusion for now, the scale model appears to be a very powerful instrument in the design processes for future designs still to be made: more of these Invented Cities Z are on their way, since their two older sisters, the London Tapes 1 and The Brussels Tapes, have already been born and appear to be alive and well!

Up till now, and conditionally dependent on the results of further research, the Story of a Supermodel of a Goddess promises to be a seductive materialized advocacy of the Reinvention of the Polis.

Jo Van Den Bergh

(Endnotes)

1 The PhD is a Quest for 'The Reinvention of the Polis through amplifying Poetics in the In-Between' with the author's own body of work as one starting point to explore the potential of Poetics in architecture as the backbone of an oeuvre or an already proven case.

This article describes the scale model as a research instrument within the PhD program.

2 These designs were selected very carefully out of a whole body of work, with their transition characteristics towards the public space and their poetic potential as the criteria of selection within the context of the PhD program.

These three projects will not be shown here, since this is not intended to be a monograph on the work of an architect. Let the information about them be rather enigmatic and limited to this: the first one is an urban family house belonging to the 'downtown' city [House DGD, 1999], the second one an almost-urban family house - for a person into cybernetics - being part of the city wall at the end of 'downtown' [House B, 2005] and the third one a 'non-place' architectural object designed for a Japanese multinational to function everywhere on the planet [Project O, 1996].

3 Julian Lampens, PhD arch, teacher and mentor of the author.

4 The author is very well aware that the first person singular 'I/me' is a sin - and even a crime - in the Kingdom of Science, but he is determined to continue in his errant ways.

Of course, this is not an imaginary letter from the author as writer of the letter and the author of the article itself. This is the hypercontextual 'triple me', which makes this article a non-distinct, non-objective example of a non-scientific moment of weakness. If only it could be viewed by the reader (i.e. you) as opposed to the the read (i.e. me), as a successful step - however faltering and imperfect - in the direction of honesty and rigour, the author would be flattered.

5 David Bowie, (1970): title track from the album 'The Man Who Sold the World', Mercury Records. Covered by Nirvana, (1993): 'The Man Who Sold the World', MTV Unplugged, Sony Music Studios, New York.

6 The author spent last summer in a London under surveillance, with 500,000 CCTV cameras and a whole army of security agents watching him. Now, in November 2008, news articles and other media are reporting that Boris Johnson, London's new mayor, has prohibited 'One Nation under CCTV', a work of art by graffiti artist Banksy. In the meantime, Coca Cola has put up a billboard on Darlinghurst Road, Kings Cross, Sydney, Australia, spanning 41 metres, reaching a height of 13 metres and costing \$5 million....

7 Gianbattista Noli (1748): 'The Noli Map', was commissioned by Pope Benedict XIV as the new and most accurate plan of Rome. It consisted of twelve engravings in copper. The plan spans 177 by 206 centimetres.

8 In this aspect, Noli continues the approach of Buffon's map of 1551.

9 Gianbattista Piranesi, (1756): 'L'Antichità Romane', v.1.

10 Maarten Delbeke, Dirk De Meyer, Bas Rogiers, Bart Verschaffel (eds.), (2008): 'Piranesi: De prentencollectie van de Universiteit Gent', Exhibition Catalogue Museum for Fine Arts, Ghent, p.82, MSK A&S/books, Ghent [translation by the author].

11 Ibidem, p.86 [translation by the author].

12 Daniel Libeskind, (December 1979): 'End Space', p.20, Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, US.

13 Ibidem, p.22.

14 'Unlike the critic and philosopher the architect must embrace the contradictions between perceptions and logic, the slippage between architectural intention and realization, and the unpredictability of the future's judgement upon the acting present... this book represents a humble attempt to articulate words and images with this generative intention in mind' (Steven Hall, Julian Pallasma, Alberto Pérez-Gómez, (1994 and 2006): 'Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture', from the preface, William Stout Publishers, San Francisco

15 'Imagination is related to the real. Fantasy belongs to the sphere of the unreal ... Only when fantasy acts as a catalyst to the imagination is one able to create works of reality that are blessed with the new, the fresh vision, the never before tried. Fantasy is the catalyst of imagination, while imagination is the filter through which fantasy must pass in order to become an ingredient of reality' (Anthony C. Antoniadis, (1992): 'Poetics of Architecture: theory of Design', p.11, Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York / London).

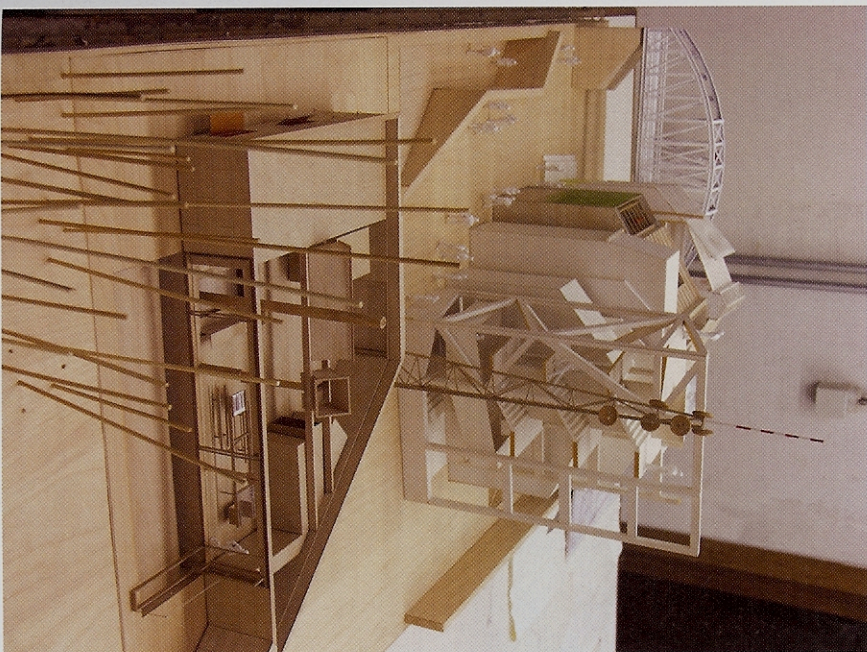
16 A comparable technique has been applied by Katja Grillner in her PhD thesis, in which she combines three characters in a dialogue, with herself coming from the 20th century and two English gentlemen from the 18th century who probably never met each other, but all three of them still having imaginary but profound conversations.

Katja Grillner, (2000): 'Ramble, linger and gaze: dialogues from the landscape garden', Department of Architecture, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm.

17 This goes both for the personal body of work of the author-architect himself as for the version of the urban fabric which has been the 'densified' version of an existing provincial town in Flanders to present the architectural designs in.

18 It is in this specific hands-on-setting - the mythical and metaphoric Polis - that the architectural and cultural invasion trespasses into the void urban enclaves to attack the FORMAL, solid house of status and official culture and to infect it with the healing virus of INFORMAL, fluid coming from the subcultures of the streets. But all this of course belongs to the vast acres of investigation in the rising palace of the PhD, in which the Supermodels are intended to be the servant under the King's command, the seducing instrument of research for more desired designs to come.

19 Leon van Schaik, Design Research Seminar, Sint-Lucas Brussels, 2007-09-13,14,15.



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